

Why I Am Leaving The CIA

By John Stockwell

John R. Stockwell was 27, a graduate of the University of Texas and a Marine veteran working as a market analyst for a rubber company in Colorado when he was recruited into the CIA in 1964. A week ago, he resigned from the agency and explained his reasons in the following letter to Adm. Stanfield Turner, the new director of central intelligence. Stockwell plans to move to Texas and become a house builder.

31 March 1977

Sir:

WE HAVE NOT MET and will not have the opportunity of working together, as you are coming into the Central Intelligence Agency as I am leaving. Although I am disassociating myself from the Agency, I have read with considerable interest about your appointment and listened to some of your comments. You have clearly committed yourself to defending the Agency from its detractors and to improving its image, and this has stirred a wave of hope among many of its career officers. However, others are disappointed that you have given no indication of intention or even awareness of the need for the internal housecleaning that is so conspicuously overdue the Agency.

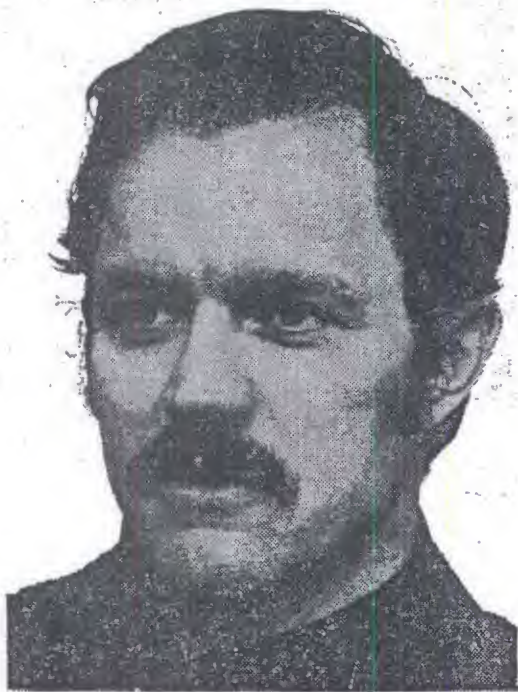
You invited Agency officers to write you their suggestions or grievances and you promised personally to read all such letters. While I no longer have a career interest,

having already submitted my resignation, numerous friends in the DDO [Deputy Directorate for Operations] have encouraged me to write you, hoping that it might lead to measures which would upgrade the clandestine service from its present mediocre standards to the elite organization it was once reputed to be. While I sympathize with their complaints, I have agreed to write this letter more to document the circumstances and conditions which led to my own disillusionment with CIA.

First, let me introduce myself. I was until yesterday a successful GS-14 with 12 years in the Agency, having served seven full tours of duty including chief of base, Lubumbashi; chief of station, Bujumbura; officer in charge of Tay Ninh Province in Vietnam, and chief, Angola Task Force. My file documents what I was told occasionally, that I could realistically aspire to top managerial positions in the Agency. I grew up in Zaire, a few miles from the Kapanga Methodist Mission Station which was recently "liberated" by Katangese invaders, and I speak fluent English and Tshiluba, "High" French and smatterings of Swahili and other dialects.

My disillusionment was progressive throughout four periods of my career. First, during three successive assignments in Africa from 1966 through 1977, I increasingly questioned the value and justification of the reporting and operations we worked so hard to generate.

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By Larry Morris — The Washington Post

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In one post, Abidjan, there was no Eastern bloc or Communist presence, no subversion, limited United States interests and a stable government. The three of us competed with State Department officers to report on President Houphouët-Boigny's health and local politics.

I attempted to rationalize that my responsibility was to contribute, and not to evaluate the importance of my contribution, which should be done by supergrades in Washington. However, this was increasingly difficult as I looked up through a chain of command which included, step-by-step: a) the branch chief, who had never served in Africa and was conspicuously ignorant of black Africa; b) the chief of operations, who was a senior officer although he had never served an operational overseas tour and was correspondingly naive about field operations; and c) the division chief, who was a political dilettante who had never served an operational tour in Africa. Their leadership continuously reflected their inexperience and ignorance.

Standards of operations were low in the field, with considerable energy devoted to the accumulation of perquisites and living a luxurious life at the taxpayer's expense. When I made "chief of station," a supergrade took me out for drinks and, after welcoming me to the exclusive inner club of "chiefs," proceeded to brief me on how to supplement my income by an additional \$3-4,000 per year, tax free, by manipulating my representational and operational funds. This was quite within the regulations. For example, the COS Kinshasa last year le-

gally collected over \$9,000 from CIA for the operation of his household. Most case officers handled 90 per cent of their operations in their own living rooms, in full view of servants, guards and neighbors. And I expect few individuals would accept CIA recruitments if they knew how blithely their cases are discussed over the phone: "Hello, John . . . when you meet your friend after the cocktail party tonight . . . you know, the one with the old Mercedes . . . be sure to get that receipt for \$300 . . . and pick up the little Sony, so we can fix the signaling device."

In Burundi we won a round in the game of dirty tricks against the Soviets. Shortly after my arrival, we mounted an operation to exploit the Soviets' vulnerabilities of having a disproportionately large embassy staff and a fumbling, obnoxious old ambassador, and discredit them in the eyes of the Burundi. We were apparently successful, as the Burundi requested that the ambassador not return when he went on leave, and they ordered the Soviets to reduce their staff by 50 per cent. We were proud of the operation, but a few months later the Soviets assigned a competent career diplomat to the post and he arrived to receive a cordial welcome from the Burundi who were more than a little nervous at their brashness and eager to make amends. For the rest of my tour relations were remarkably better between the two countries than before our operation. The operation, nevertheless, won us some accolades. However, it left me with profound reservations about the real value of the operational games we play in the field.

Later, Africa Division policy shifted its emphasis from reporting on local politics to the attempted recruitments of the so-called "hard targets," i.e., the accessible Eastern European diplomats who live exposed lives in little African posts. I have listened to the enthusiastic claims of success of this program and its justification in terms of broader national interests, and I have been able to follow some of these operations wherein Agency officers have successfully befriended and allegedly recruited drunken Soviet, Czech, Hungarian and Polish diplomats,



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by servicing their venal and sexual (homo and hetero) weaknesses. Unfortunately, I observed and colleagues in the Soviet Division confirmed to me that none of these recruited individuals has had access to truly vital strategic information. Instead, they have reported mostly on their colleagues' private lives in the little posts. Not one has returned to his own country, gained access to strategic information and reported satisfactorily.

Agency operations in Vietnam would have discouraged even the most callous, self-serving of adventurers. It was a veritable Catch-22 of unprofessional conduct. Ninety-eight per cent of the operations were commonly agreed to be fabrications, but were papered over and promoted by aware case officers because of the "numbers game" requirements from Headquarters for voluminous reporting. At the end, in April 1975, several senior CIA field officers were caught by surprise, fled in hasty panic and otherwise abandoned their responsibilities. One senior officer left the country on R & R leave five days before the final evacuation, abdicating all responsibility for the people who had worked for him and for the CIA in his area. Numerous middle and lower grade officers vigorously protested this conduct, but all of these senior officers, including the one who fled, have subsequently received responsible assignments with the promise of promotions.

AFTER VIETNAM, I received the assignment of chief, Angola Task Force. This was despite the fact that I and many other officers in the CIA and State Department thought the intervention irresponsible and ill-conceived, both in terms of the advancement of United States interests and the moral question of contributing substantially to the escalation of an already bloody civil war, when there was no possibility that we would make a full commitment and ensure the victory of our allies. From a chess player's point of view, the intervention was a blunder. In July, 1975 the MPLA was clearly winning, already controlling 12 of the 15 provinces and was thought by several responsible American officials and senators to be the best qualified to run Angola; nor was it hostile to the United States. The CIA committed \$31 million to opposing the MPLA victory, but six months later it had, nevertheless, decisively won and 15,000 Cuban regular army troops were entrenched in Angola with the full sympathy of much of the Third World and the support of several influential African chiefs of state who previously had been critical of any extra-continental intervention in African affairs. At the same time, the United States was solidly discredited, having been exposed for covert military intervention in African affairs, having managed to ally itself with South Africa and having lost.

This is not Monday morning quarterbacking. Various people foresaw all this, and also predicted that the covert intervention would ultimately be exposed and curtailed by the United States Senate. I myself warned the Interagency Working Group in October, 1975 that the Zairian invasion of northern Angola would be answered by the introduction of large numbers of Cuban troops, 10-15,000, I said, and would invite an eventual retaliatory invasion of Zaire from Angola. Is anyone surprised that a year later the Angolan government has permitted freshly armed Zairian exiles to invade the Shaba province of Zaire? Is the CIA a good friend? Having encouraged Mobutu to tease the Angolan lion, will it help him repel its retaliatory charge? Can one not argue that our Angolan program provoked the present invasion of Zaire which may well lead to its loss of the Shaba's rich copper mines?

Yes, I know you are attempting to generate token support to help Zaire meet its crisis; that you are seeking out the same French mercenaries the CIA sent into Angola in early 1976. These are the men who took the CIA money but fled the first time they encountered heavy shelling.

Some of us in the Angolan program were continuously frustrated and disappointed with Headquarters' weak leadership of the field, especially its inability to control the Kinshasa station as it purchased ice plants and ships for local friends and on one occasion tried to get the CIA to pay Mobutu \$2 million for an airplane which was worth only \$600,000. All of this, and much more, is documented in the cable traffic, if it hasn't been destroyed.

I CAME AWAY from the Angolan program in the spring of 1978 determined to reassess the CIA and my potential for remaining with it. I read several books with a more objective mind, and began to discuss the present state of the American intelligence establishment from a less defensive position. I read [Morton] Halperin's book and [Joseph] Smith's and [David] Philips'. I was seriously troubled to discover the extent to which the CIA has in fact violated its charter and begun surveilling and mounting operations against American citizens. I attempted to count the hundreds, thousands of lives that have been taken in thoughtless little CIA adventures.

A major point was made to me when I was recruited in 1964 that the CIA was highminded and scrupulously kept itself clean of truly dirty skulduggery such as killing and coups, etc. At that exact time, the CIA was making preparations for the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, who had grown up a few miles east of my own home in the Kasai. Eventually, he was killed, not by our

poisons, but beaten to death, apparently by men who were loyal to men who had Agency cryptonyms and received Agency salaries. In death he became an eternal martyr and by installing Mobutu in the Zairian presidency we committed ourselves to the 'other side,' the losing side in central and southern Africa. We cast ourselves as the dull-witted Goliath, in a world of eager young Davids. I for one have applauded as Ambassador [Andrew] Young has thrashed about trying to break us loose from this role and I keenly hope President Carter will continue to support him in some new thinking about Africa.

But, one asks, has the CIA learned its lesson and mended its ways since the revelations of Watergate and the subsequent investigations? Is it now, with the help of oversight committees, policed and self-policing?

While I was still serving as the Central Branch Chief in Africa Division last fall, a young officer in my branch was delegated away from my supervision to write a series of memos discussing with the Justice Department the possibilities for prosecution of an American mercenary named David Bufkin. Bufkin had been involved in the Angola conflict, apparently receiving monies from Holden Roberto, quite possibly from funds he received from the CIA. In anticipation of the possibility that during a trial of Bufkin the defense might demand to see his CIA file under the Freedom of Information Act, it was carefully purged. Certain documents containing information about him were placed in other files where they could easily be retrieved but would not be exposed if he demanded and gained access to his own file. I heard of this and remonstrated, but was told by the young officer that in his previous Agency assignment he had served on a staff which was responding to Senate investigations and that such tactics were common, "We did it all the

time," as the Agency attempted to protect incriminating information from investigators.

NONE OF THIS has addressed the conditions which my former colleagues have begged me to expose. They are more frustrated by the constipation that exists at the top and middle levels of the DDO, where an ingrown clique of senior officers has for a quarter of a century controlled and exploited their power and prestige under the security of clandestinity and safe from exposure, so that no matter how drunken, inept or corrupt their management of a station might be, they are protected, promoted and reassigned.

The organization currently belongs to the old, to the burned out. Young officers, and there are some very good ones, must wait until generations retire before they can move up. Mediocre performances are guaranteed by a promotion system wherein time in grade and being a "good ol' boy" are top criteria, i.e., there are no exceptional promotions for superior performance. The truly exceptional officer gets his promotions at the same time as the "only-good" and even some of the "not-really-so-good" officers, and he must wait behind a line of tired old men for the truly challenging field assignments. These young officers are generally supervised by unpromotable middle-grade officers who for many years have been unable to go overseas and participate personally in operational activity. These conditions are obviously discouraging to dynamic young people, demoralizingly so, and several have told me they are also seeking opportunities outside the Agency.

With each new Director they hope there will be a housecleaning and reform, but each Director comes and goes, seven in my time, preoccupied with broader matters of state, uttering meaningless and inaccurate platitudes about conditions and standards inside the DDO. The only exception was James Schlesinger, who initiated a housecleaning but was transferred to the Department of Defense before it had much effect.

You, sir, have been so bold as to state your intention to abrogate American constitutional rights, those of freedom of speech, in order to defend and protect the American intelligence establishment. This strikes me as presumptuous of you, especially before you have even had a good look inside the CIA to see if it is worth sacrificing constitutional rights for. If you get the criminal penalties you are seeking for the disclosure of classified information, or even the civil penalties which President Carter and Vice President Mondale have said they favor, then Americans who work for the CIA could not, when they find themselves embroiled in criminal and immoral activity which is commonplace in the Agency, expose that activity without risking jail or poverty as punishment for speaking out. Cynical men, such as those who gravitate to the top of the CIA, could then by classifying a document or two protect and cover up illegal actions with relative impunity. I predict that the American people will never surrender to you the right of any individual to stand in public and say whatever is in his heart and mind. That right is our last line of defense against

the tyrannies and invasions of privacy which events of recent years have demonstrated are more than paranoid fantasies. I am enthusiastic about the nation's prospects under the new administration and I am certain President Carter will reconsider his position on this issue.

And you, sir, may well decide to address yourself to the more appropriate task of setting the Agency straight from the inside out.

Sincerely,
JOHN STOCKWELL

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John Stockwell in a helicopter in Vietnam in the spring of 1975.